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Buffalo police officers await arraignment as supporters gather outside court

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Body

BUFFALO - Hundreds of law enforcement officers gathered outside two Buffalo courthouses on Saturday in support of two police officers expected to be arraigned on criminal charges for shoving an elderly protestor to the ground at a march against racism.

Cheers erupted from police and firefighters supporting the officers as the crowd opened a black umbrella and held a black sheet to obscure WGRZ television news cameras from getting footage of the two officers once they emerged from a holding area behind Frank A. Sedita City Court.

The crowd then marched to the county courthouse, where WGRZ reported the two officers were being held to be "virtually arraigned" in city court. Umbrellas were again opened up in front of television cameras, which captured images of hundreds of firefighters and police officers, some wearing shirts reading "We back the Blue."

Two members of the Buffalo Police Department's Emergency Response Team were suspended without pay on Thursday and are being investigated after a local radio station released video of the incident involving the protester, Martin Gugino. He reportedly remains in a hospital intensive care unit (ICU).

"I cannot confirm any details until an arraignment takes place," said Kait Munro, a spokeswoman for the Erie County District Attorney John Flynn.

The western New York state city saw pockets of looting after dark like many cities across the United States, where countless otherwise peaceful protests were staged in the wake of the death of George Floyd, a black man in police custody in Minneapolis on May 25.

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown told reporters he has not asked for the officers to be fired.

"That investigation is proceeding - I've asked to move swiftly," Brown said. "It is very important that the officers know they are getting due process."

"Our information was that individual was an agitator - he was trying to spark up the crowd," Brown said. "What was reported to me was that individual was a major instigator."

He praised Governor Andrew Cuomo for sending in state police to join with the city police force to ensure safety in Buffalo. Brown said an 8 p.m. - 5 a.m. curfew will remain in place until Monday morning.

Gugino is a longtime activist who has advocated for affordable housing, ***climate justice*** and police accountability and regularly protested outside the Erie County Holding Center, a Buffalo jail that has come under scrutiny for a string of inmate deaths, according to John Washington, a community organizer who has known him for a decade.

(Additional reporting by Barbara Goldberg in Maplewood, New Jersey; Editing by Diane Craft) !@COPYRIGHT=© 2020 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

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